

Implementing University/Academicians' Social Responsibility Conceptual Framework in Medical Colleges

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Corporate social responsibility (CSR) concept has its roots in philanthropy. Now, it has become a necessity for a successful business. In 21st century, the focus is upon the ways in which any business, on a voluntary basis, may contribute to sustain the development scenario by proactively participating in solving various society level issues. A crucial CSR dimension is the mode of interaction of enterprises with their staff, clients, community, NGOs, civic authorities, etc. CSR involves the commitment by business enterprises for economic development such that it improves the living standards of the employees as well as their families besides development of neighborhood and the community. CSR is an important tool of value addition in business management, which fulfills its obligation to the societal welfare by protecting the environmental resources affected by its anticipated actions and policies.¹

This concept has not been incorporated into institutions of learning and thus needs to be applied to academic institutions also, since these are important parts of our society. Universities are, now, expected to contribute constructively to social development transcending all barriers. University Social Responsibility (USR) seeks to develop and strengthen societal commitment. It also encourages active citizenship among the students and the academic staff. Besides their routine academic activities, they need to be encouraged to work for service provision to the neighborhood and to promote commitment for holistic sustainable development with a focus on ecological, environmental aspects. As such, academic institutions have a tremendous potential to give a sense of direction to students and society, enabling them to accord social relevance and kindle societal interest.

Here, universities are expected to be flexible enough to adapt locally and respond to various changes so as to meet the postmodern world challenges. This way, these will be able to catalyze the change dynamics favorably. Universities need to improve the students' involved and dedicated response to the societal needs.

By implication, this concept may also apply to hospitals/medical colleges, which, so far, were mainly concerned with

patient care. They hardly have a direct one to one contact and shape the relationship with the society at large. Being an education and research institute, Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER) caters to a good number of students, fellows, staff, and faculty members. Given its vast reach and captive audience of young students and professionals, introducing a concept of USR/ASR can be one of the most cost effective investments PGIMER can make to improve the relationships with patients and community members while simultaneously retaining and nurturing the highest standards of service, education and research.

One such example of ASR initiative is from the Neuroscience Research Lab of the institute. For more than 233 weeks their volunteers have been dedicating 2 h every week in actively cleaning the areas in and around the institute complex. Their goal was not only to create and sustain cleaner and healthier environment around the institute but also to bring positive changes among people working in the institute, patients and their relatives from northern India who seek treatment at this reputed Institute. Volunteers interact with the weekly assembly, educating them about the importance of hygienic surroundings in preventing diseases. The importance of self-hygiene and clean surroundings is highlighted through demonstration of correct method of hand washing, coughing, and its linkage to prevention of communicable diseases. Their work has motivated onlookers resulting in a drastic change in the vicinity of the institute. A dumping area was changed into a garden. Several dustbins were installed at the pavement where people used to litter the waste on the street. New urinals were also built near the wall of PGIMER with

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the help of volunteers. A foot path was made through the lawns by authorities in order to prevent people from walking on grass after consistent awareness programs focused around this area.²

Encouraged by this initiative, the Department of Community Medicine and School of Public Health, PGIMER, Chandigarh have mooted a concept of “Academicians’ Social Responsibility” (ASR) and institutional social responsibility (ISR) within and around the campus since November 1, 2019. The SOPs are being worked out under the guidance of Dean (academics) of the institute. The initiative proposes to harness, harvest, and nurture the vast (but so far unutilized) potential of the students and staff of the department for enhancement of the image of PGIMER. The proposed venture is based on the fact that, so far, within the Department, the training of students of Master of Public Health and Bachelor of Public Health was mostly classroom-based. It is proposed to involve them in practical ASR/ISR activities, which will help in improving PGI’s impact. It is also proposed to develop a plan to enhance the quality of physical, social and mental environment of the institute. This venture also includes enhancement of the patient/caregivers’ satisfaction through implementing the concept of “patient-centered care” in the

institute. Already, our humble contributions on the issue are uploaded on the PGI website, under the icon of “Public Forum,” drop down menu in patient empowerment section. Here, our collaborative work with Obstetrics and Gynecology, Orthopedic, and Surgery departments has been summarized.

The whole idea of ASR/ISR is that all of us should not just remain itinerant members of the institute/medical college. We gain knowledge, training, recognition, and our livelihood from the institute. In addition to our assigned tasks, we should also work to develop and promote healthy and sustainable policies and planning throughout the institute for the overall benefit of the society. The moot question is... WHAT WE GIVE BACK to it and to the society. ASR/ISR concept will provide the mechanism to do that.

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